

The House Majority Caucus unveiled its package of bills for this legislative session to address some of its top priorities.

University of Hawaii

The University of Hawaii has continued to grapple with deteriorating facilities and infrastructure. Recognizing the need to address the backlog of repairs and maintenance needed at our institutions of higher learning, the House Majority Caucus has introduced House Bill No. 2521, which establishes the University of Hawaii Repair and Maintenance Account, and requires one percent of state general revenues to be deposited into this account to improve university facilities.

Smart Growth and Land Use

Land use has been an ongoing concern for House Democrats. During the 2007 interim, the House Interim Task Force on Smart Growth held a number of meetings with stakeholders to discuss the use of smart growth principles in new and existing communities. As a result, the House Majority Package includes several measures to address smart growth and other land use issues in Hawaii.

House Bill No. 2518 establishes a land conservation tax credit to encourage the preservation and protection of valuable lands in our state. Greenways and trails are another avenue to preserving land - House Bill No. 2527 requires the Department of Land and Natural Resources to establish a statewide greenways and trails system. Land reclassification issues are addressed in House Bill No. 2522.

One factor that has affected smart growth is the lack of synergy between the counties and the state. Several measures have been introduced to require county plans to be considered in various stages of planning and development. House Bill No. 2523 requires the Land Use Commission to consider county plans in its decision making criteria. House Bill No. 2524 requires the Statewide Transportation Council to comply with county general plans and transportation plans, to the extent that federal funding is not impacted, in the preparation of the statewide transportation plan.

In some cases, smart growth principles should be considered as part of the foundational principles of public planning. House Bill No. 2525 requires the Hawaii Community Development Authority to incorporate the principles of smart growth in its community development rules. House Bill No. 2526 adds smart growth principles to the State Plan.

Agriculture

The House Majority Caucus also remains committed to supporting the fight against invasive species. House Bill No. 2516 authorizes the issuance of \$6.5

million in general obligation bonds to begin the process of establishing biosecurity facilities at the Honolulu International Airport and Honolulu Harbor. House Bill No. 2517 strengthens the laws regulating noxious weeds and imported plants.

Health and Caregiving

Hawaii is suffering from a shortage of physicians, dentists, and other health care workers. House Bill No. 2519 creates the Hawaii Health Corps which will provide, among other things, incentives such as loan forgiveness and stipends for health care professionals and emergency responders who work in areas of the state where there is a shortage.

During the 2007 interim, the House participated in the Joint Legislative Committee on Family Caregiving to address the concerns of individuals caring for loved ones at home, rather than placing them in an institutional setting. House Bill No. 2520 allows caregivers to collect temporary disability insurance benefits to care for a family member.